

Story 1478 (1989 Tape 10)

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Turkish Justice in the Time of Fatih Mehmet¹

This is a story about the great sense of justice in the courts of İstanbul in the time of Fatih Mehmet. I am forty years old, and I heard this story some time ago as it was being told by an eighty-year-old man.

When Fatih Sultan Mehmet was having a palace built for himself, he had some columns of great historical interest brought from Egypt to be included in the building materials. One of the architects--he was a Greek--decided to cut off the tops of these columns before they were used in the construction of the new palace. When Fatih Mehmet discovered this, he became very angry, and he ordered that the architect's hands be cut off as punishment.

After his hands had been cut off, the Greek architect took his case to an Islamic religious court. That was a kind of court that existed in those days. The court called Fatih Mehmet

¹Mehmet II was the Turkish sultan who defeated the Byzantines to conquer what was then known as Constantinople. Fatih means conqueror, and the conquest of Constantinople was so significant that the title Fatih was henceforth used before his name.

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and questioned him. The judges of the court asked him: "Why did you order that the hands of this architect be cut off?"

Fatih Sultan Mehmet explained the situation to the court.

Then one of the judges asked him, "Did you decide all by yourself what punishment to give this man? Didn't you consult any court about your action?"

"No."

The judge then said, "You should have consulted a court before doing such a thing, but you didn't. Therefore the court has decided to have your hands cut off, too."

When the Greek architect heard the court's decision, he was amazed at this example of Turkish justice. He said, a court can judge the ruler of a land and impose punishment upon him, it is part of a great system of justice. I have therefore decided to withdraw my accusation. If the sultan will give me three hundred gold liras, I shall cancel all charges."

Fatih Sultan Mehmet gave the architect six hundred gold liras. This shows that Turks are always just people.